



SOUTH WEST WALES INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

CYLCHLYTHYR

CYMDEITHAS ARCHAEOLEG DIWYDIANNOL DE ORLLEWIN CYMRU

No. 16: July 1977

Editorial Committee: F.G.Cowley, P.R.Reynolds, W.I.Roberts

Price to non-members: 10p.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday July 23rd. Visit to Llandybie. Starting time: 2.30 p.m.

Assemble at the Red Cow Inn in the centre of Llandybie for a visit to the Cilyrychen and Pentregwenlais limekilns and to Tirydail tinsplate works. The leaders will be the Revd. Gomer Roberts, author of 'Hanes plwyf Llandybie', the standard history of the parish, and Bryn Thomas, one of our members and author of several books on the history of Llandybie and district.

Saturday August 27th. Visit to Rhandirmwyn lead mines. Starting time: 3.00 p.m.

Meet Mr Michael Evans at the Royal Oak public house on the eastern side of the river at Rhandirmwyn. Visible remains include the zinc sulphide plant, pumping house, crushing mill, smelting house and levels. It is also said that there are traces of Roman workings in the neighbourhood. (To reach Rhandirmwyn, turn left off the A40 at Llandovery just before entering the town. The road is the same one as for Llyn Brianne reservoir.)

N.B. FOR BOTH THESE EVENTS, PLEASE MAKE YOUR OWN TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS.

If you need help with a lift, please contact Idris Roberts (60330) or Paul Reynolds (21525).

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 1977

The President of the Society, Professor F.Llewellyn-Jones, in his address, took as his theme a broad view of the economic importance of early Welsh industry. No country was more rich in its variety of industries and in the development of particular skills which provided the basis for the establishment in the area of large modern plants. However, insufficient recognition had been given to the efforts of earlier generations.

The tinsplate industry continues to thrive in the area, although all the small mills have closed as a result of the opening of the large BSC complexes. Hardly a trace now remains of these early tinsplate works. The chemical industry, too, flourishes in the form of the massive BP complex. One notable reminder of the past which has now disappeared was Dowlais House, the home of the Guest family or ironmasters. It was renowned because of Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Mabinogion, but more importantly, for its role in the development of the Merthyr iron industry.

The President thanked Swansea Corporation for allowing the society to hold its meetings in the Guildhall during the past winter; and also Mr John Bunt who had made the Glynn Vivian Gallery available at short notice. The difficulty of finding accommodation still remains, but next winter the premises in Gloucester Place allocated to the Swansea Council for Voluntary Service may be available, and lectures arranged in co-operation with the Extra-Mural Studies Department will continue to be held in the Royal Institution.

Some interesting aerial views of Scott's Pit were shown by Mr Barry Fagg. The infra-red photographic technique showed distinctly areas of soil disturbance.

To conclude the meeting the Chairman, Mr Alun Richards, introduced Mr Hayden Holloway's photographic record of the visit made to Merthyr by the Society in the previous summer. Entitled 'Merthyr's Iron Kingdom', the slides were accompanied by a taped commentary.

W.I.R.

NOTES AND NEWS

Ynysgedwyn Ironworks. Brecknock Borough Council's derelict land reclamation scheme on the site of the ironworks is soon to go ahead, but the well-known chimney stack and arches are to be preserved. However, the partially wrecked furnace bank is too decayed to be worth saving and this will be destroyed. The brick-built chimney, 160 feet high, and its associated arches date from 1872 and represent a final attempt at revivifying the works which had by then gone into decline because of the growth of the steel industry on the coast. The scheme came to nothing and the ironworks closed in 1876 with these new buildings unfinished. It is ironic that the once highly successful Ynysgedwyn Ironworks should have as its memorial these incomplete relics of its final decline.

The "Ivy May!" During March this canal barge was raised from the bed of the Neath Canal at Tonna and transferred to Cardiff where she is already on display in the grounds of the new Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum. Built in 1934 by Will Evans, the Neath Canal Company's foreman for many years, the Ivy May is 58 feet long and weighs about 3 tons. She was deliberately sunk some ten years ago because vandals were in the habit of taking free rides in her and then leaving her cast adrift. Prior to that her normal duties had been to carry ash for repairing the towpath.

Constitution Hill tramway. It is still possible to find traces of this cable-worked tramway which once climbed Swansea's Constitution Hill. On the surface of the road the line of the rails is still visible in the cobbles, and at the top of the hill there is the derelict winding house. In April Swansea City Council decided to demolish the winding house because it has been vandalised and is unsafe to passers-by. The wall bulges and has had to be propped up, and it is felt that children could hurt themselves playing in the ruins. The owners of the property cannot now be traced. The tramway was opened in 1898 with two cars: as one went down, the other went up. At the passing place, half way up the hill, the track widened to double width, but otherwise it was single. Even before operations started there had been trouble with the Board of Trade's inspector; and when it was finally pronounced serviceable it soon became apparent that there was a total lack of customers. In 1903 the Company sold out to a Thomas Saunders who seems to have disposed of all the equipment. An informative article on the subject appeared in the South Wales Evening Post for 4 May 1977.

Standing Conference on the History of the South Wales Valleys. This recently-formed body is based on Tŷ Toronto Aberfan, Merthyr Tydfil. It exists to encourage the study of the history of the valleys and the preservation of records, buildings and artefacts related to them. Its long-term aim is to produce a definitive history of the valleys. An inaugural meeting was held on 26 February last at which several addresses on local history were given, a constitution adopted and a committee elected. Membership is open to societies and groups or to private individuals. Further information from Idris Roberts, Paul Reynolds or the Revd. Erastus Jones, Tŷ Toronto, 55 Aberfan Road, Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 4QJ.

IA Courses

1. "Industrial Archaeology in the Midlands", 18-23 July, Nottingham
 - a short residential course concentrating on the early textile industry, transport, and the iron industry in the east Midlands, with visits to a number of sites.
 - Cost: £29-00 plus cost of excursions.
2. "Water Mills and the Pottery Industry", 23-25 September, Castleton, Derbyshire
 - a weekend course at the Peak National Park Study Centre.
 - Cost: £23-00 plus £1-00 approx. for admission fees on the excursions.

Leaflets and booking forms for these courses are available from Paul Reynolds.

"Trams by Post" A list of books on trams and model tram kits for sale has been received from the Mumbles Railway Co. Please contact Paul Reynolds if you would be interested in seeing it, or send a large s.a.e. for your own copy to the Mumbles Railway Company, P.O.Box 79, Cheltenham, Glos.

OLD LETTER BOXES IN SWANSEA

The first pillar boxes in Swansea were erected towards the end of 1856 in Bathurst Street, Northampton Place and on the Quay (The Cambrian, 7 November 1856). Further boxes were constantly being provided, and by 1914 there were at least 70 pillar boxes and wall letter boxes in the town. However, of all these Victorian and Edwardian boxes that once existed, only a handful now remain. All the others have been removed, the commonest reasons being road alterations, building demolition and the need to provide boxes with a larger posting aperture. The average Victorian envelope was quite a bit smaller than modern ones, and the aperture was of a corresponding size. With the increase in the size of envelopes at the beginning of this century a number of complaints were made of letters being lodged in pillar box apertures. In Swansea this change-over seems to have occurred in the early 1930s to a very large extent.

The design of letter boxes changed frequently during the 19th century as attempts were made to improve it and evolve the ideal design. The dates of these various alterations are all known. Letter boxes are also quite often listed in directories, such as Kelly's, and are marked on large scale Ordnance Survey maps. Using all these sources, therefore, it is possible to date any particular letter box fairly precisely in a great many cases.

The surviving letter boxes of the Victorian and Edwardian periods in Swansea only number 15, six pillar boxes and nine wall boxes. They are as follows:-

Queen Victoria

1. Montpellier Terrace/ Constitution Hill. The oldest surviving pillar box in Swansea is an example of the so-called Anonymous Cylindrical type. It has been given this name because of the complete absence of any wording or the royal cypher. Note the very small posting slot high up under the roof. This type of box was made in the years 1879-1883 by Andrew Handyside of Derby.
 2. Wern Terrace, Port Tennant. Wall letter box of a type current in the period 1861-1871 and made by Smith & Hawkes of Birmingham. The three small holes at the bottom should be noted, the idea being that any rain which found its way in through the aperture would thus drain away.
 3. Carmarthen Road Post Office. Wall letter box cast by the Eagle Range & Foundry Company of Birmingham during the years 1887-1901. Road widening at this point, due to start in a year or two, will probably mean the loss of what is nowadays a rather uncommon type of box.
 4. Church Park, Oystermouth. Wall letter box of a type cast by W.T.Allen of London between 1881 and 1901. This example appears on the 125" O.S. map of 1897 and can therefore be dated to 1881-1897.
 5. Overland Road, Oystermouth
 6. Smelters' Arms, Trewyddfa Road, Morriston
 7. Llansamlet Church.
- } Three examples of a smaller type of Allen wall box, also dating from 1881-1901.

Edward VII

8. Ystrad Road, Fforestfach. An example of the first type of Edwardian pillar box (1901-1904) in which the posting aperture did not form part of the door. The art-nouveau style of lettering used at the base for the manufacturer's name is worth noting.
 9. Eaton Crescent
 10. Hawthorne Avenue, Uplands
 11. Oakwood Road, Brynmill
 12. Sketty Avenue.
- } Four examples of the second type of Edwardian pillar box (1904-1910). In the former year the design was modified so that the door reached to the very top and included the aperture. This was done to prevent letters becoming lodged at the top and so failing to be collected. The Eaton Crescent example can be dated very closely to 1904-1906 since it first appears in Kelly's Directory for 1906.
13. Sketty Road. Large size wall box made by W.T.Allen. Date: 1904-1910.
 14. Technical College, Mount Pleasant. Medium size wall box, also made by Allen. It can be dated to 1909-1910 because the building in which it is installed dates from 1909.
 15. Thomas Hill, Mumbles. Smallest type of Edwardian letter box, cast by Allen. Unlike nos. 8-14, it lacks the elaborate and attractive royal cypher.

"SHEEPDOGS FOR A RAILWAY"

Clearing the line in Wales

Canine "track sense"

"Licences have just been taken out by the Great Western Railway Company for 25 sheepdogs which are kept to assist gangers in keeping certain of the valley lines in the Cardiff, Neath, Newport and Oswestry engineering divisions of the system clear of straying sheep. The sheep come down from the surrounding hills and find their way through the fences into the railway cuttings in search of pasture, and in so doing endanger their own lives and delay trains.

The duties of the railway sheepdog are even more onerous than those of the shepherd's dog. It not only has to round up the sheep and guide them through an obscure opening which it has to find, but it also has to acquire "track sense" so that it may be safe from passing trains.

The dogs are trained to answer the verbal commands, sometimes given in Welsh, the whistles, and hand signals of their masters from a considerable distance. But they do not always wait to be told what to do and have often routed trespassers long before the gangers' arrival. They are also trained to know what the warning whistle of an approaching train means; they give warning to the permanent-way men working on the line and will not leave the line until all the men are clear. The "track sense" developed by these dogs is remarkable. If caught between the sets of lines while driving a sheep from the running lines they will lie down until the two trains have passed.

The dogs begin their training at an early age, in some cases before they are six months old, and there are today a number of them with more than seven years' service on the railway to their credit. They live with their masters, but the annual licence fee is paid by the Company. All are mongrels of the sheepdog type."

(The Times, 3 February 1937.)

DATED STREET IRONWORK

Following the note on this subject in a recent issue of the Newsletter, the following specimens have been reported by Gerald Gabb, Fred Cowley and Paul Reynolds:-

1. Victoria Avenue, Mumbles, near junction with Chapel Street. Drain cover inscribed 'Hirwaun Works 1902'. Examples have also been seen on Mumbles Road near The Mayals.
2. Stanley Street, Mumbles. Drain cover inscribed 'T.W. Williams and Son, Swansea, 1907'. Another example is to be found at the junction of Queens Road and Oakland Road.
3. Alley between Newton Road and Castle Crescent. Sewer plate reading 'The Sanitary and Oeconomic Association, Gloucester'.
4. Outside Mumbles Post Office. Plate inscribed 'Swansea Gas Lt. Company 1869' Additional examples are situated outside 86 Newton Road, 80 Newton Road, 614 Mumbles Road, and on Mumbles Road between West Cross and The Mayals (two). Doubtless a good many others exist. Gas lighting first came to Mumbles and West Cross in 1868.
5. Gower Place, Mumbles. Undated sewer cover reading 'Dynevov Engineering Co., Neath'.
6. Verandah Street, Swansea. Iron plate set in pavement. 'T.W. Williams, Wellington Foundry, Swansea, 1887'.
7. Cromwell Street, Swansea. Coalhole door: 'T.W. Williams, Wellington Foundry, Swansea, 1878'. An identical example also exists in nearby Heathfield. Many other such doors with different dates can be seen in the older parts of Swansea.

In addition many lamp-posts in the older parts of the borough have the date cast on at the foot, although in a number of cases the pavement level has risen over the years and obscured this date.

The firm of T.W. Williams which manufactured a lot of this kind of ironwork had a foundry in Greenfield Street originally. It subsequently moved out to Dunvant and seems to have ceased trading during the 1920s.

"DISCOVERY OF A SILVER MINE IN GOWER"

A rich valley

"While North Wales has been bragging of its gold mines, those who are acquainted with the geological formations of South Wales are rather inclined to believe that the Silurian strata which crops out near Llandilo might prove as productive of auriferous wealth as the Snowdonian range! It is an historical fact that the Romans worked gold from the old Silurian deposits at Llandilo, and it is also a fact that the Romans worked silver in Gower. There is a disused mine in Bishopstone Valley, from which the Caesars extracted silver, and it is also said that in those far-off days they worked the silver ore which crops out at Brandy Cove. In more recent times an attempt was made to develop silver and lead mining near Hareslade Farm, but the attempt was not very successful. The lode was lost, and the money spent in driving a heading from the sea, was, to a certain extent, thrown away. We remember reading in one of Brett Harte's novels, the "Millionaire of Rough and Ready" we believe, of a market gardener sinking in his garden for water, and discovering a rich gold deposit. A similar event has occurred at Hareslade Farm. Within the last few weeks workmen have been engaged in sinking a winch or well in the neighbourhood of the farm. They went down to a depth of 90 feet, and had a plentiful supply of delightfully pure water. But they not only found water at a depth of 30 feet, they went through a silver and lead lode, which previous prospectors had been looking for. This was a considerable thickness, and was very rich, a specialist, on examining the quartz, declaring it to contain from 17 to 20 ounces of silver per ton, together with an amount of lead. It lay in a slanting direction in the valley, and is probably the same lode that crops out at Bishopstone, and we should think from its thickness and evenness, that it should command the attention of prospectors and those engaged in mining. Brandy Cove may hereafter be named the "Silver Glen". It is well-known that a silver lode exists in the middle head at Mumbles, but no attempt has been made to prove this, and to see whether it is worth working. It is just possible that the Peninsula of Gower, if it was well prospected, might be found a profitable district for those who seek to develop the mining of precious metals."

(Mumbles Chronicle, 20 April 1888.)

LOWER LLIW DAM

For the last year or more the Lower Lliw Dam near Felindre (SN 620 035) has been in the process of complete reconstruction in order to provide a week's reserve water supply for the Glamorgan Water Division in the event of pollution or interruption of supply higher up. Through the kindness of Mr Hugh Samuel, an engineer working on this project and a member of the SWWIAS, it was possible for a small party to visit the site recently and inspect a number of features of IA interest.

The dam was originally built in 1862-1867 by Swansea Corporation. By 1873 it had become apparent that it was leaking. Since an alternative supply of water had to be found before the Lower Lliw reservoir could be emptied and the dam repaired, Blaenant Ddu reservoir was constructed in the next valley to the west. When it was completed in 1879 repairs started on the original dam. The following year the British Association paid a visit during their meeting at Swansea, and a paper describing the repair work was read on site by the engineer in charge, Edward Cousins (The Cambrian, 31 August 1880). In 1883 another failure occurred. As before, the reason was that the foundations of the dam were permeable and the clay core had been eroded from below. This time the water level was reduced by about 30 feet and for the rest of its working life the reservoir was used well below full capacity.

The original dam has now been completely removed as part of the reconstruction, but the original drawings are still available. The old overflow tunnel of dressed Pennant sandstone blocks had also been almost entirely destroyed at the time of our visit, although traces of it could still be seen. However, the most interesting relic was a wooden flume or channel constructed to lead the River Lliw away from the foundations of the dam, either when it was first constructed or at the time of the 1879-1880 repairs. It is made of pitch pine and founded on piles driven into the floor of the valley. It is thought to have been built by shipwrights from Swansea. It is currently being used for its original purpose, that is, as a temporary draw-off channel to lead the river away from the site of the new dam. It will eventually be submerged once again when the reservoir is refilled. The possibility was considered of transferring a section to the Industrial & Maritime Museum, but it was felt in the end that it would survive better under water. Photographs and drawings have been made of it.

Although not connected with the reservoir, a very interesting building is to be seen a little to the north, and that is the engine-house of Felindre Pit. Judging by the masonry, it was probably erected in about 1830, but seems never to have been completed. At some later date it was roofed over and served as a dwelling house until earlier this year. It is of the Cornish type, similar to that at Scott's Pit, and seems only to have been completed as far as the opening for the pumping beam. Although documentary evidence is as yet totally lacking for its history, it would appear that Felindre Pit was never worked productively after it had been sunk. The amount of spoil in the neighbourhood is small; the tramway leading from the pit peters out after less than a mile in the middle of nowhere; and the engine-house seems to have been left unfinished. Mr Samuel was also told a story by an informant in Clydach to the effect that the pit was sunk by a French contractor who failed to find workable reserves of coal, and that as a result of this the coalowners were forced into bankruptcy. There is no written authority for this tale, but the mention of the French contractor is a piece of circumstantial information that adds credibility to it.

This note is based on information given by Mr Samuel at the time of our visit, and on an article by G.R.Howe in the journal Concrete, 'Past and present of the Lower Lliw Dam', vol.11, no.5, May 1977, pp.14-17, an account, with illustrations, of the history and present reconstruction of the dam.

P.R.R.

RECENT LITERATURE

R.E.BOWEN. 'The Burry Port and Gwendraeth Valley Railway' (Carmarthenshire Antiquary, 12, 1976, pp.68-90.)

An interesting and entertaining account of one of the less well-known mineral railways of South Wales. The B.P. & G.V.R. originated as the Kidwelly and Llanelly Canal Co. and was converted into a railway by an Act of Parliament of 1865. During the 1870s it "struggled on its erratic, unprofitable way" in a "Shangri-La existence", but it emerged from this to become a highly profitable concern, paying a 14% dividend in 1921. Raymond Bowen finishes his account with the take-over by the G.W.R. in 1922.

T.JAMES. 'Carmarthen Tinplate Works, 1800-1821' (Carmarthenshire Antiquary, 12, 1976, pp.31-54.)

Carmarthen Tinplate Works was established in 1761 by Robert Morgan, a former partner at the Kidwelly works. Under his son, John, the works expanded and in 1800 the Morris family of bankers were taken into partnership. They were to play a major part in the affairs of the works thereafter. A considerable amount of new material has recently become available for the history of the works in this period, which reflects the growing domination of private enterprise by joint stock. The Morris-Morgan partnership was dissolved in 1821, but the works remained in existence until 1900.

A.R.HALL and N.SMITH (eds.) History of Technology, vol.I. (Mansell, 1977.)

The first of a series of annual volumes on the history of technology and technical processes, and their wider economic and social relationships.

S.RICHARDS. The Rhondda & Swansea Bay and South Wales Mineral Railways; The Cardiff Railway; The Port Talbot Railway. (Published by the author and available from Tŷ John Penry, Swansea. 75p each.)

These three booklets form the first in a series which aims to supply short histories of some of the South Wales railway companies which are not already covered by the well-known Oakwood Press series. Unfortunately they fall far short of that series both as regards depth of coverage and standards of production. The information given only provides an outline of the history of each company, but seems to be accurate so far as it goes. Each booklet costs 75p which seems rather expensive for what it is. In particular, the standard of the illustrations is very disappointing.